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ABSTRACT

A study involving 42 special education consultants was conducted to determine the contribution of selected consultant characteristics and community demographic variables to the effectiveness of special education consultation. A review of the literature revealed that the consultant effectiveness is a function of multiple factors involving both consultant and community characteristics. Eight measures of consultant effectiveness were used in the study, including the number of children served, number of programs developed per child, and mean academic gain of children. Three stages of the consultation progress were considered: contact or referral, program implementation, and outcome or program effectiveness. Among findings were that the referral stage seems to be influenced primarily by community demographic variables and the consultant's integrative complexity and years of experience; that the mode of program implementation is a function of socioeconomic factors, as well as consultant teaching experience and interpersonal behavior; and that academic gain is influenced most strongly by consultant interpersonal behavior. (SBH)

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The Relationship of Demographic and Interpersonal Factors to Consultant Effectiveness

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Introduction and Method

The purpose of the study was to investigate the contribution of selected consultant characteristics and community demographic variables to the effectiveness of special education consultation. Consultation can be seen as one of the most important knowledge-linking roles in the dissemination and utilization of educational research and theory (Havelock, 1076). It has particular relevance to current practices in special education which have been moving toward decentralized services with consultation to the regular classroom teacher as a critical component. Yet research on educational consultation is at a relatively low level of analyses and warrants further attention.

In approaching this study, I reviewed a substantial body of research on consultation processes. What I discovered was that a large, almost bewildering number of factors have been suggested as important to the success of consultation. To simplify my review of this literature and the logic of my research, let me say here that the suggested factors fall conveniently into two large groups. One group simply represents features or characteristics of the consultant. The second involves factors likely to influence the receptivity of the consultee.

Of the consultant characteristics, the most important seem to be the consultant's background and experience, interpersonal effectiveness, and problem solving skills. Of those factors affecting the receptivity of the consultee, the most important seem to be the training and background of the consultee, the demography of the school community, and specific characteristics of the school itself such as size. In designing the present study, I wished to assess the relative contribution of each of these major groups of factors.

Theoretical analyses of educational consultation have stressed the importance of the interpersonal relationship of consultant to consultee (Guskin, 1976). Consultation, by definition, is an interpersonal process and many of the social psychological concepts relevant to an understanding of such processes have been extended to educational consultation. While the extension of interpersonal concepts to consultation seems theoretically sound, there have been few studies of their validity in situations of actual educational consultation. In the present research, two kinds of interpersonal variables were studied. First, a number of demographic characteristics of the consultant, suggested by the social psychological literature (such as the age, sex, and experience of the consultant), were examined. These characteristics could be expected to affect the interpersonal attractiveness and role status of the consultant. A second type of interpersonal variable involved the actual interpersonal behavior of the consultant. The work of Leary (1957) and of Schutz (1966, 1967) suggested that the interpersonal dimensions of control, affection, and inclusion could be related to consultant effectiveness and were likewise included in the study. Schutz (1966, 1967) operationalized these dimensions in a test instrument referred to as the Fundamental Interpersonal Orientations scale (FIRO-B). The FIRO-B yields six scores reflecting the extent to which the individual expresses or wants control, affection, and inclusion in interpersonal relationships.

Another important consultant characteristic suggested by the literatures involves problem solving skills. The consultant is likely to encounter a diversity of backgrounds theoretical orientations, and educational problems. As such, the effectiveness of the consultant is likely to be affected by the ability to react to each consultee in a flexible manner, integrating and respecting the consultee's point of view and generating a solution appropriate to the specifics

of the situation. The dimension of integrative complexity described in the work of Harvey, Hunt, and Schroder (1961) seems to reflect this ability. Integrative complexity is said to involve the ability of an individual to consider opposing or contradictory points of view and to generate solutions which synthesize them in a meaningful way. As such, the Paragraph Completion Test (Schroder, Driver, and Streufert, 1967) which was developed as a measure of integrative complexity was also included in the study.

Turning to those factors likely to influence the receptivity of the consultee, the present study examined several community and school characteristics. The educational and income levels and tax base of the school district as well as the number and size of schools served by the consultant were included. These factors have been shown to exert a strong influence on the delivery and impact of educational services. In the present context, they could be seen as exerting a variety of indirect effects on the consultation process by predisposing the consultee to accept or reject the consultant's advice.

In summary, the literature suggests that the consultant effectiveness is a function of multiple factors involving both consultant and community characteristics. The following table summarizes those examined in the present study.

Insert Table 1 here

The design of the study called for using these variables to predict consultant effectiveness in a series of multiple regression analyses. Eight measures of consultant effectiveness were used and are summarized in the next table.

Insert Table 2 here

Obviously, consultant effectiveness can be defined in a variety of ways. These eight measures were selected on several grounds. First, I felt it was important to include both subjective and objective measures of effectiveness. The subjective evaluation of the consultant is reflected by the principal's rating of the consultant using a Semantic Differential Technique. The remaining measures were selected on the basis of the objectives set by the Vermont State Department of Special Education for the consultants involved in the study.

The consultants studied were 42 consulting teachers employed in 27 school districts throughout Vermont. All of the consulting teachers were employed as Special Education consultants and were responsible for providing consultation for at least 40 handicapped children within the school year. It is important to note that the population of consultants studied were all trained in the same program, have a similar theoretical orientation, and approach consultation in a similar fashion. This feature of the present study distinguishes it from other studies of consultation in which there is typically a much greater diversity of background among consultants. Presumably, the homogeneity of the population of consultants studied reduced the variance.

Results and Discussion

Given the design of the study in which predictor variables were examined in eight separate regression analyses, a single statement regarding the relative importance of predictor variables is not possible. The relative contribution of predictor variables differed according to the measure of consultant effectiveness used. Rather than simply recite the results of each analysis in turn, a conceptual model in which the results can be organized will first be presented.

The consultation process as studied in this research seems to involve three distinct stages. One, there is a stage of contact or referral. The number of children served by the consultant, the number of teachers in courses and workshops, and the number of teachers referring children all reflect this stage of consultation. Two, there is a stage of program implementation. Once contact has been established, the consultant and teacher must arrive at a strategy of implementation. In the particular consultation situation studied, the strategy could vary in site, i.e., in or out of the classroom agent, i.e., the number of programs developed per child. Three, there is a stage of outcome or program effectiveness. This stage is reflected most directly by the increase in grade level shown by children served in the process. It is also reflected less directly in the principal's rating of the consultant's performance.

(1) The first stage of consultation, the contact or referral stage, seems to be influenced primarily by community demographic variables, and the consultant's integrative complexity and years of experience. These relationships can be seen in Table 3 which summarizes the first five steps of the analyses of the teacher-referral, children-served, and course-enrollment variables.

Insert Table 3 here

As you can see, significant relationships were found in each case with some combination of these predictors.

Community socioeconomic factors were important across analyses. While these factors may influence contact or referral in a number of ways, they are likely to affect teacher selection and teacher attitudes. Use of consultant services increases with the educational attainment and tax support of the community. In particular, these community factors may engender in teachers an attitude of concern toward students who are not making sufficient academic progress thereby leading to an increase in the utilization of the consultant's services. The negative contribution of community income suggests a greater need for consultative services in poorer communities as well as the greater availability and support of in-service training in the wealthier communities.

The consultant variables which are important at this stage indicate that consultants with greater teaching experience and who demonstrate a higher level of integrative complexity are more successful in generating referrals and enrolling teachers in courses and workshops. Since outcome measures at this stage of consultation simply reflect contact with the consultant, prior experience and integrative complexity may be operating by increasing the attractiveness of the consultant. Consultants who are experienced, verbally fluent, creative in problem solving, flexible, non-authoritarian, and so forth seem to create a more receptive climate toward the utilization of their services. Taken together, the variables at this stage suggest that community socioeconomic factors act to create a level of receptivity toward the consultant, but from that point on the matter of contact is function of the teacher's perception of the ability and flexibility of the consultant.

(2) The second stage of the model involves the program implementation process. In the present study, the proportion of programs implemented in the classroom, the proportion implemented by the teacher directly, and the number

of programs per child exemplify this stage and illustrate the programmatic alternatives which remain once the consultant and teacher have made contact. The results of the first five steps of the analyses of these variables are summarized in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 here

The particular pattern of results obtained at the second stage of consultation suggests that the mode of program implementation is a function of socioeconomic factors, as well as consultant teaching experience and interpersonal behavior. Socioeconomic factors seem to operate in two ways. The proportion of programs implemented within the classroom and the proportion implemented by the classroom teacher both increase with tax effort. These findings suggest that communities which provide relatively greater financial support of education also provide greater support to the concept of mainstreaming. On the other hand, these same outcome variables are negatively related to community income. These findings suggest that wealthier communities are more likely to segregate students requiring special services.

Teacher experience was related to the portion of programs implemented within the classroom and to the number of programs per child. The proportion of programs implemented within the regular classroom decreases with the teaching experience of the consultant. Since programs administered outside of the classroom may be implemented by the consultant, this finding suggests that consultants with a good deal of teaching experience may have greater difficulty accepting a purely consultative role. Since the proportion of programs developed per child increases with years of experience, it suggests that consultants with greater teaching experience may be more skilled in program development.

Interpersonal variables were found to influence the proportion of programs implemented within the classroom and the proportion implemented by the teacher directly. The proportion of programs implemented within the classroom was related to wanted control while teacher implementation was related to wanted and expressed affection. The less control the consultant seemed to want or need, the more likely it was that programs would be implemented in the classroom. Given Schutz' (1967) discussion of this variable, this finding may reflect consultant independence and strong leadership qualities as well as the ability to give up personal control. As far as teacher implementation itself is concerned, the results indicate that teachers are most likely to implement programs themselves when consultants are low in expressed affection and high in wanted affection. What these relationships may suggest is, first of all, that the consultant with a strong need for approval may exert a greater control over the teacher regarding this feature of programming. It may also suggest that the consultant who expresses affection or positive supporting comments excessively is less likely to have a positive impact than one who expresses positive comments sparingly or judiciously.

(3) The third stage of the conceptual model involves the outcome of the consultation process which may be evaluated objectively in terms of the degree of academic gain produced or subjectively in terms of the principal's rating of the consultant. The results of the five steps of the analyses of these outcome variables are summarized in Table 5.

Insert Table 5 here

The results indicate that academic gain was influenced most strongly by consultant interpersonal behavior. The mean increase in grade level of children served by the consultant was positively related to wanted affection and expressed control and negatively related to wanted control. The operation of these variables at this stage of consultation is difficult to understand since academic change is a cognitive rather than interpersonal phenomena. These variables could have an effect on the outcome of consultation, however, if the consultant were able to persuade teachers or paraprofessionals to follow programs more carefully, to devote more time to referred children, and so on. Given the particular interpersonal variables which are important at this stage, this would seem to be the case. The affection and control dimensions are said by Schutz (1967) to be related to the provision of feedback and to leadership abilities, respectively.

The principal's perceptions of the consultant were found to be related to interpersonal and demographic characteristics of the consultant. Females, with little consulting experience who want a high degree of approval and acceptance but do want to be considered dependent, are viewed by their principals as generating positive affect. Although this analysis seems to present a profile of an inexperienced woman, with a high need for approval, one must consider the characteristics of the raters. The majority of the principals who provided the ratings were males, who often had a lower educational attainment level than the consultant and who worked in environments dominated by women.

Table 1

Summary of predictor Variables

Variable	Abbreviated Name
Consultant age	Age
Consultant sex	Sex
Years of teaching experience of consultant	Yrs. Teach.
Years of consulting experience	Yrs. Consult.
Number of schools served by consultant	Sch. Served
Median educational level of community	Ed. Level
Median income level of the community	Income
Tax effort of the community	Tax Effort
FIRO - expressed inclusion	FIRO-EI
FIRO - expressed control	FIRO-EC
FIRO - expressed affection	FIRO-EA
FIRO - wanted inclusion	FIRO-WI
FIRO - wanted control	FIRO-WC
FIRO - wanted affection	FIRO-WA
Integrative Complexity	Int. Complex.
Number of teachers in schools served	# Teachers
Number of students in schools served	School Size

Table 2

Summary of Criterion Variables

Variable	Abbreviated Name
Number of children served by consultant	# Children
Number of teachers in courses and workshops	Courses
Number of teachers referring to consultant	Referrals
Proportion of programs implemented in class	In Class
Proportion of programs implemented by teachers	Teacher.Impl.
Number of programs developed per child	Prog./Child
Mean academic gain in grade level of children	Acad. Gain
Principal's Perceptions	Prin. Percep.

TABLE 3

SUMMARY OF FIRST FIVE STEPS OF MULTIPLE REGRESSION ANALYSES: I CONTACT OR REFERRAL VARIABLES

Number of Children Served			Number of Teachers in Courses/Workshops			Number of Teachers Referring Children		
Variable(s)	Beta	R^2	Variable(s)	Beta	R^2	Variable(s)	Beta	R^2
1. Tax Effort	.46**	.21**	Int. Comp.	.26	.07	Ed Level	.34*	.12*
2. Tax Effort	.47**	.28**	Int. Comp..	.35*	.15	Ed Level	.38*	.20*
Int. Complex.	.26		Ed Level	.30		Sch. Served	.28	
3. Tax Effort	.38*	.32**	Int. Comp.	.48**	.33**	Ed Level	.47**	.27**
Int. Complex.	.33		Ed. Level	.76**		Sch. Served	.31*	
Ed. Level	.24		Income	-.61**		Int. Complex	.28	
4. Tax Effort	.37*	.38**	Int. Comp.	.46**	.38**	Ed. Level	.43**	.31**
Int. Complex.	.34*		Ed. Level	.74**		Sch. Served	.32*	
Ed. Level	.31*		Income	-.58**		Int. Complex	.31	
Yrs. Teach.	.25		Yrs. Consult	-.22		Sex	.21	
5. Tax Effort	.33*	.42**	Int. Complex	.45**	.43**	Ed. Level	.68**	.36**
Int. Complex.	.36*		Ed. Level	.69**		Sch. Served	.24*	
Ed. Level	.34*		Income	-.67*		Int. Complex	.39	
Yrs. Teach.	.33*		Yrs. Consult.	-.26		Sex	.28	
Yrs. Consult.	.21		Tax Effort	.28		Income	-.37	

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

TABLE 4

SUMMARY OF FIRST FIVE STEPS OF MULTIPLE REGRESSION

ANALYSES: II. PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION STAGE

	Proportion in Classroom			Proportion by Teacher			Programs per child		
	Variable(s)	Beta	R^2	Variable(s)	Beta	R^2	Variable(s)	Beta	R^2
1.	Tax Effort	.29	.08	Tax Effort	.45**	.20**	Yrs. Teach	.34*	.12*
2.	Tax Effort	.27	.14	Tax Effort	.59**	.28**	Yrs. Teach	.31*	.21**
	Yrs. Teach	-.23		Income	-.31*		Tax Effort	-.31*	
3.	Tax Effort	.31*	.19**	Tax Effort	.58**	.34**	Yrs. Teach	.32*	.30**
	Yrs. Teach.	-.24*		Income	-.30*		Tax Effort	-.32*	
	FIRO-WC	-.24*		FIRO-EA	-.23		Int. Complex	-.30*	
4.	Tax Effort	.41*	.51*	Tax Effort	.62**	.38**	Yrs. Teach	.20**	.37**
	Yrs. Teach.	-.26*		Income	-.34*		Tax Effort	-.40*	
	FIRO-WE	-.23*		FIRO-EA	-.42*		Int Complex	-.31*	
	Income	-.21		FIRO-WA	.28		Age	.29	
5.	Tax Effort	.42*	.56**	Tax Effort	.69**	.40**	Yrs. Teach	.18**	.41**
	Yrs. Teach.	-.25*		Income	-.34*		Tax Effort	-.37*	
	FIRO-WE	-.26*		FIRO-EA	-.36*		Int. Complex	-.28*	
	Income	-.29		FIRO-WA	.32		Age	.32*	
	Sch. Served	-.21		FIRO-WC	-.19		FIRO-WC	-.20	

TABLE 5

SUMMARY OF FIRST FIVE STEPS OF MULTIPLE REGRESSION

ANALYSES: III. OUTCOME STAGE

	Mean Academic Gain			Principal's Ratings		
	Variable(s)	Beta	R^2	Variable(s)	Beta	R^2
1.	FIRO-WC	-.39*	.15*	Yrs Consult	-.32*	.10*
2.	FIRO-WC	-.49**	.22**	Yrs Consult	-.34*	.19*
	FIRO-WA	.29		Sex	.29	
3.	FIRO-WC	-.48**	.28**	Yrs Consult	-.35*	.24*
	FIRO-WA	.29		Sex	.28	
	Yrs. Teach.	.24		FIRO-WA	.24	
4.	FIRO-WC	-.54**	.32**	Yrs Consult	-.33*	.29*
	FIRO-WA	.35*		Sex	.35*	
	Yrs. Teach.	.23		FIRO-WA	.28	
	FIRO-EC	.21		FIRO-EI	-.22	
5.	FIRO-WC	-.55*	.36**	Yrs Consult	-.28**	.33*
	FIRO-WA	.29		Sex	.47	
	Yrs. Teach.	.24		FIRO-WA	.26	
	FIRO-EC	.21		FIRO-EI	-.29	
	Sch. Served	.21		Tax Effort	-.24	

Intercorrelation Matrix of All Variables (N=42)

		Independent Variables																	Dependent Variables							
		Age	Sex	Yrs. Teach.	Yrs. Consult.	Sch. Served	Ed. Level	Income	Tax Effort	FIRO-EI	FIRO-EC	FIRO-EA	FIRO-WI	FIRO-WC	FIRO-WA	Int. Complex.	# Teachers	Sch. Size	# Children	Courses	Referrals	In Class	Teach. Impl.	Prog./Child	Acad. Gain	Prin. Percep.
Independent Variables	Age																									
	Sex	.13																								
	Yrs. Teach.	.39	.08																							
	Yrs. Consult.	.25	.06	-.33																						
	Sch. Served	.12	-.08	.07	.22																					
	Ed. Level	-.17	.23	-.26	.04	-.13																				
	Income	-.09	.34	-.09	.08	-.34	.69																			
	Tax Effort	.23	.42	-.09	.18	-.13	.40	.46																		
	FIRO-EI	.07	.31	.10	.11	-.16	-.10	.02	-.10																	
	FIRO-EC	-.16	-.04	.02	-.08	.06	-.10	.09	.04	.28																
	FIRO-EA	-.16	.05	-.16	.22	-.28	.03	.04	-.02	.30	-.03															
	FIRO-WI	.01	.26	.03	.03	-.09	-.06	.07	-.04	.49	.04	.46														
	FIRO-WC	.16	-.11	-.06	.25	-.17	.04	.10	.18	.19	.16	.42	.14													
	FIRO-WA	-.11	.05	-.01	.02	-.32	-.11	.09	-.09	.20	-.19	.68	.30	.38												
	Int. Complex.	.04	-.18	.03	-.04	-.05	-.29	-.01	-.03	.19	.30	-.07	.04	.16	.18											
	# Teachers	-.31	.15	-.14	-.01	.23	.40	.24	.27	-.14	.18	-.06	-.23	-.26	-.16	-.13										
	Sch. Size	-.30	.07	-.21	.00	.21	.40	.23	.23	-.18	.08	-.09	-.29	-.24	-.19	-.13	.96									
Dependent Variables	# Children	.19	.23	.15	.16	.06	.29	.35	.46	.14	.11	-.09	.08	.11	.06	.25	.19	.21								
	Courses	.10	-.01	.03	-.26	-.01	.20	-.09	.19	-.07	.13	-.03	-.23	.13	-.04	.26	-.06	-.08	.22							
	Referrals	-.02	.23	-.03	.05	.24	.34	.11	.29	.01	.06	-.07	-.11	.18	-.15	.13	.25	.30	.41	.48						
	In Class	.08	.21	-.26	.05	-.14	.20	-.02	.29	.02	.02	-.03	.09	-.16	-.06	-.09	.09	.13	-.01	.08	.17					
	Teach. Impl.	.24	-.18	.09	-.10	.22	.03	-.04	.45	-.11	-.11	-.25	-.25	-.13	-.09	.15	.35	.26	.16	.06	-.09	.34				
	Prog./Child	.27	.09	.34	-.08	.02	-.02	-.09	-.34	-.04	-.04	.02	.02	-.27	.03	-.28	-.21	-.16	-.02	-.02	-.20	.09	-.13			
	Acad. Gain	-.02	.14	.26	-.30	-.18	-.21	.03	-.09	-.01	-.01	.07	.07	-.39	.10	.06	.03	.04	-.12	.24	-.31	-.17	-.17	.23		
	Prin. Percep.	-.27	.27	.01	-.32	-.23	.19	.13	-.10	-.10	-.10	-.02	-.02	-.04	.24	.09	.01	-.02	.04	.25	.10	.10	.03	.08	.05		

$p < .05$ when $r > .30$
$p < .01$ when $r > .39$
*$N = 41$ for this variable